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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

12 APR 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Net Assessment of North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese Military Forces

In February I asked the CIA, with selected assistance from DoD elements, to initiate a net assessment of North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese military forces. The broad idea was to strike a balance sheet as of two dates: (a) the current date and posture, and (b) a near-term date and prospective posture. A number of specific criteria and assumptions were specified. Of perhaps more interest, however, were the general parameters outlined. Those parameters included:

- . Troop levels (quantity and quality)
- . Equipment
- . Training
- . Leadership
- . Morale
- . Overall capability of each force to
  - defend its own territory
  - project its military power across national boundaries

In addition, I asked that the study delineate the effect of the USSR and PRC aid and material support in terms of

- . Past, current, and prospective aid levels.
- . What added support could be extended to Hanoi.
- . How much more or less effective the DRV forces would be with augmented or lessened aid levels.
- . Why the USSR and the PRC had not given more sophisticated or larger quantities of weapons to Hanoi.

CIA, with DoD support, has completed the initial net assessment. I am attaching a copy. It is, in my judgment, a solid -- not to mention a timely -- piece of work. It represents an assessment on which we should be able to build over the coming weeks and months and on which we should draw heavily in our various deliberations.

I commend this Net Assessment to your personal attention and to that of the President.



Attachment

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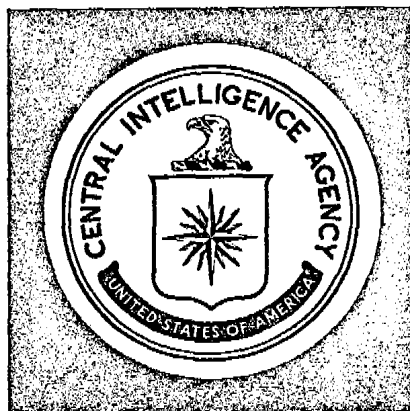
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# Memorandum

*Net Assessment of North Vietnamese  
and South Vietnamese Military Forces*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
10 April 1972

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

NET ASSESSMENT OF NORTH VIETNAMESE  
AND SOUTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY FORCES

Introduction

1. This memorandum presents a net assessment of the North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese armed forces. It considers the principal strengths and weaknesses of both forces as of two dates - early April 1972 and 1 January 1973. In addition to providing quantitative measurements of the two forces, the memorandum examines certain intangible factors such as morale, national will, and leadership, as well as the contribution which foreign aid has made to the military strength of both sides. Finally, it contains a series of appendixes which treat specific parts of the problem in greater detail.

2. During the preparation of this memorandum, the North Vietnamese began a major offensive in South Vietnam which will almost certainly evolve into a "net assessment" of the two sides' armed forces, played out for real on the field of battle. Present evidence indicates that the action will be heavier than anything which has occurred in South Vietnam since 1968, and that this offensive will involve an all-out effort by Hanoi. If so, this campaign's results will clearly have major implications for the military strengths of both sides by 1 January 1973, the later of the two dates which we consider. If the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) is driven back after a month or so with losses far heavier than those suffered by the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN), Hanoi will have a substantially weaker - or at least less effective - army in January 1973 than it has at present, both absolutely and relative to the ARVN. If, on the other hand, the ARVN suffers several major defeats, takes casualties as heavy as those of the NVA, and seems in general to be unable to stand up to the NVA, then it is the ARVN which will be in a substantially weaker position, materially and psychologically, at the beginning of next year. We have taken these factors into account to the best of our ability, but we caution that the fluid, fast-evolving situation on South Vietnam's battlefields precludes confident or certain Washington projections of future net assessments.

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The Quantitative BalanceGround Forces - North VietnamThe Present Situation

3. As of early April 1972, the NVA had achieved a maximum forward posture, in terms of the combat forces deployed outside the borders of North Vietnam. Both the movement of NVA infiltration groups into South Vietnam and Cambodia over the past half year and the deployment of integral combat units of the NVA support this judgment.

4. So far this dry season (September 1971 through early April 1972), Hanoi has dispatched about 120,000 infiltrators to the southern war zones. This compares with some 106,200 during the entire dry season last year (September 1970 through June 1971). The following tabulation shows the areas to which these troops were sent.

	<u>1970/71</u> <u>(Sep-Jun)</u>	<u>1971/72</u> <u>(Sep-early Apr)</u>
GVN MRs 1 and 2		
Tri-Thien-Hue	6,000	12,000
MR 5	14,200	16,000
B-3 Front	14,500	42,000
GVN MRs 3 and 4 and Cambodia		
COSVN	45,000	36,000
Southern Laos	26,500 <u>a/</u>	14,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>106,200</i>	<i>120,000</i>

*a. Including some units deployed for Lam Son 719.*

5. The figures above include the movement of the NVA 320th Division to the B-3 Front, and of the NVA 324B Division to Military Region Tri-Thien-Hue (TTH). They do not, however, include other NVA forces which have recently moved into South Vietnam as organic combat units rather than as infiltration groups. These will be discussed in paragraph 7, below.

6. Our best judgment is that this year's infiltration has resulted in an expansion of the NVA combat order of battle (OB) in South Vietnam by about 22,000 men, and in Cambodia opposite GVN Military Region (MR) 3 by about 5,000 men. Most of the remaining 93,000 infiltrators are to be used to provide a stock of fillers to offset combat casualties and to expand the enemy's rear services system in southern Laos and Cambodia. (Some infiltrators, of course, have been lost en route, either because of disease or because of Allied interdiction efforts.)

7. A further expansion of the enemy forces in South Vietnam occurred with great speed in late March and early April 1972 when 28,000 more combat troops deployed into the country in organic units from North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.\* Since 12,000 of these troops were included in the threat category of the December 1971 OB estimate, the net OB increase from these unit redeployments amounts to 16,000. This increase, together with the 22,000 OB increment resulting from infiltration, raised the enemy's combat forces in South Vietnam to about 115,000-130,000 men in early April 1972 (see the table on p. 5).

8. The recent movements of NVA forces to areas outside North Vietnam have led to significant changes in the comparative enemy-versus-friendly main force combat strengths in South Vietnam. As can be seen from the following tabulation, GVN Main Forces in all military regions still enjoy a numerical superiority, but the degree of that superiority is substantially greater in MRs 3 and 4 than in MRs 1 and 2.

First Qtr	Main Force Ratios (Allied to VC/NVA) <sup>a/</sup>				
	MR 1	MR 2	MR 3	MR 4	Total
1968	2.4	3.3	3.9	2.4	2.9
1970	2.5	7.0	4.5	8.3	4.2
1972	1.9	2.1	7.8 (3.3)	7.4 (4.6)	3.3 (2.8)

*a. The figures are a ratio of aggregate maneuver battalion strength. They include US forces for 1968 and 1970 only, and in 1972 they include the GVN's Regional Force battalions. The figures in*

\* These forces include the 304th and 308th Divisions from North Vietnam, elements of the 2nd Division from southern Laos, and three regiments from Cambodia which have moved into MR 3.

parentheses result from the inclusion of all of COSVN's 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions, parts of which are still in Cambodia deployed near the MR 3 border; and the Phuoc Long Front 1st Division, which has moved opposite MR 4. The ratios also include for 1972 the 320th, 324B, 308th, and 304th NVA Divisions. The ARVN side of the ratio for MRs 1 and 2 includes the planned deployment of the remaining Marines and Airborne units out of the reserves but does not include other recent ARVN redeployments which would alter the ratios somewhat. This effect, however, is offset to some degree by the enemy and friendly losses thus far in the campaign. These ratios, of course, apply to the whole of each military region as of a given point in time -- 1 April of the years indicated. Within each military region, the ratios would differ from one local area to another. The ratios are also constantly changing in the specific battle areas where heavy action is now occurring, as each side makes continuing troop movements. For a more detailed discussion of the force ratio calculations used in this memorandum, see Appendix IV.

9. In addition to its commitment of manpower to South Vietnam, southern Laos, and Cambodia, Hanoi has also sharply increased its deployment of forces to northern Laos this season. Heavy infiltration to this area in the last half of 1971 included the deployment of three infantry regiments, improvements in the air defense system, and increases in heavy artillery. By the end of 1971 the NVA enjoyed a combat force superiority of about 2.5 to 1 over the Lao irregulars, [ ] Lao regular army personnel in the Plaines des Jarres area. Since then, the ratio has improved somewhat for the Allied side as additional irregulars and Thais have been introduced as reinforcements.

10. Overall, Hanoi has committed an exceptionally large portion of its military assets this year to the various military fronts outside North Vietnam. As a result of this year's infiltration, the recent unit deployments into South Vietnam, and the earlier expansion of the force structure in northern Laos, Hanoi now has on its home territory only some 15 regular infantry regiments. This is the smallest reserve force retained at home during any dry season since 1968, when the General Offensive was under way. Actually, Hanoi now has even less of a reserve force in North Vietnam than it had in 1968. Furthermore, there are clear signs that the three regiments of the 325th Division (included in this total) are now moving



Estimated Strength of Communist Regular Combat Forces  
In or Targeted Against South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

	Thousands			
	December 1969	December 1970	December 1971	Early April 1972
VC/NVA	<u>130-150</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>145-165</u>
South Vietnam	130-150 a/ b/	85-95 b/	80-90 b/	115-130
Cambodia	--	20-25	25-30	30-35
Khmer Communist	<u>N.A.</u>	<u>10-20</u>	<u>15-30</u>	<u>15-30</u>
Pathet Lao/NVA c/	<u>55-65</u>	<u>60-70</u>	<u>70-85</u>	<u>65-80</u>
Northern Laos	35-40	30-35	40-45	40-45
Southern Laos	20-25	30-35	30-40	25-35

a. This figure includes enemy main forces actually stationed in Cambodia but targeted against South Vietnam. In later years, separate estimates for South Vietnam and Cambodia have been made, but this was not done for 1969, when all enemy forces in Cambodia were considered to be part of the threat against South Vietnam, and Cambodia itself was not regarded as a theater of the war.

b. The figures for South Vietnam include those NVA forces located in southern North Vietnam between Dong Hoi and the DMZ which are considered to be targeted against South Vietnam. These forces numbered 13,000 in December 1969, 10,000 in December 1970, and 12,000 in December 1971. By late March 1972, this figure had jumped to 20,000. In late March and early April, in conjunction with the new enemy offensive, these 20,000 troops all moved into GVN MR 1. The enemy OB figure for South Vietnam does not increase by the full amount, however, since 12,000 of them had already been included in the OB figure in December 1971. Another 8,000 enemy combat troops, who are included in the early April 1972 OB figure, have moved from Cambodia and Laos into GVN MRs 2, 3, and 4 since late March.

c. This figure includes troops in air defense units.

southward and may be committed to action in South Vietnam. In addition, there is some evidence that the combat capability of a number of these reserve regiments is not very good.

### Outlook for 1973

11. The total size of the NVA (including regional forces kept inside North Vietnam) has grown from about 250,000 men in 1964 to 575,000 men at present. In the same period, North Vietnamese losses in the war have amounted to roughly 900,000 men. Hanoi is able to induct about 100,000 men each year into its armed forces without further drawing down its manpower pool, but - if historical precedent is a guide - its losses are likely to be well over 100,000 men in any year in which it launches significant offensive action. Even with high losses, of course, Hanoi could for several years induct men at the 1968 peak rate of about 200,000 per year before its manpower reserves in the prime age group for military service were exhausted. In terms of raw manpower, therefore, North Vietnam's situation is tight and getting tighter, but not critical (see Appendix I).

12. Hanoi's ability to expand its force structure over the next year will be determined by three factors: the availability of raw manpower, the quality and quantity of available cadre, and the regime's willingness to accept the cost of such an expansion. The evidence of the way that Hanoi currently perceives its limitations on this front is extremely thin. In any case, the costs of such an effort undoubtedly would be higher than they have been in the past. The raw recruits would be available for such a structural expansion of the army, but the NVA would face a far more serious problem in finding qualified NCO's and officers. The attrition rate on these has been severe in recent years, and what little evidence there is suggests that North Vietnam does not have a reserve pool of men in this category. It is probable that North Vietnam will not create any major new combat units of divisional size in the near future. We believe they still retain the option of generating at least a few main force units, although it is doubtful that the force structure would be made significantly greater in the next nine months than it now is.

13. This being the case, North Vietnam could not undertake a greater military effort against South Vietnam next year than it is doing this year, unless it were able to get additional manpower from other areas or sources. There are five such potential sources:

- a. **Training Units in the North** These contain some of Hanoi's best cadre, and the North Vietnamese might send some of them back to the front if they believed the need was great enough.

- b. **Northern Laos** The NVA combat OB in northern Laos was expanded by a division during 1971 in preparation for the current campaign. Hanoi's force level requirements in northern Laos next year will depend in large measure on the condition of Lao forces and the involvement. If there was a reduction in the fighting in northern Laos, the enemy might be able to free one of the two divisions now committed there.
- c. **Cambodia** The virtually complete reorientation of the four enemy main force divisions in Cambodia toward South Vietnam in recent weeks has been made possible in part by the poor performance of FANK. The development of Khmer Communist combat forces and the formation of eight light territorial-type NVA regional regiments in Cambodia have also made it easier for these four divisions in effect to turn their backs on FANK. If FANK's performance does not improve by next year, and that of the enemy's regional regiments does improve, the enemy might be able to upgrade some of these regional forces and use them, in addition to the four main force divisions, for attacks against South Vietnam. The number of men likely to be available from this source, however, is not great.
- d. **Air Defense** The recently expanded air defense system of North Vietnam is Hanoi's greatest potential source of additional high-quality manpower. But so long as the US air campaign -- or even the US air threat -- continues, the enemy probably will not reduce significantly the number of personnel assigned to air defense.
- e. **Recruitment Inside South Vietnam** Unless the war turns badly against South Vietnam this year, the enemy's ability to find new Viet Cong recruits in South Vietnam will remain inconsequential.

14. The conclusion from all this -- assuming that the North Vietnamese are unable to achieve significant and lasting military victories in their present offensive -- is that it will be extremely difficult for them to launch action inside South Vietnam on a heavier scale next year. If their casualties are heavy this year, they will almost certainly be unable to launch a campaign anywhere near as large as the current one.

## Ground Forces - South Vietnam

### The Present Situation

15. The total size of the South Vietnamese armed forces is about 1 million men, of which some 460,000 are main force ground troops of the ARVN or the Vietnamese Marines. (The Regional Forces (RF), Popular Forces (PF), and Vietnamese Air Force and Navy account for the remainder.) The GVN's main forces are thus substantially greater in number than the enemy's main forces ranged against them in South Vietnam. Although the South Vietnamese have had fairly serious problems in building up their armed forces to this level, their casualties in the war have been much less over the years than have the casualties of North Vietnam. On balance, the south's present manpower situation is probably somewhat better than that of the north (see Appendix III). Because its casualties are likely to be less, the south should have less difficulty than the north in maintaining its forces - numerically - at their present levels.

16. In terms of equipment and training, as well as in terms of numbers, the South Vietnamese ground forces must be rated as equal or superior to the North Vietnamese forces whom they are fighting. The South Vietnamese have made significant progress in the last several years both in military doctrine and the utilization of manpower. While they still have a long way to go, they are increasingly making military assignments and promotions on the basis of merit. Leadership and training have both improved on the whole, although here again deficiencies remain.

17. The strengthening and upgrading of the RF and PF and the creation of the Peoples Self-Defense Forces have freed ARVN regulars to perform the main force role formerly dominated by US troops. These local forces have also provided the basis for more effective and integrated local security protection. As local security has improved, leading elements of the territorial forces have moved into the main force role. In some areas, RF units - both battalions and in some cases separate companies - are now operating across provincial boundaries. In two provinces of MR 4 where security has been good (An Giang and Go Cong), all RF units have recently been operating outside their home provinces.

18. In eight of MR 4's 16 provinces, responsibility for security has rested entirely on the territorial forces. The ARVN regular units in the region have been increasingly free to operate against the enemy's in-country base areas and across the border in Cambodia.

### Outlook for 1973

19. The period of expansion for the South Vietnamese armed forces is now over. Although some South Vietnamese officials desire a further increase in the size of their army, such an increase, which would require US assistance, is not in the cards. As is the case with the NVA, ARVN will be fighting in 1973 with a force structure essentially no larger than that which exists today. Any changes which are made will essentially be readjustments within the existing force structure.

20. Assuming that the present enemy offensive is ultimately beaten back by Allied forces without any lasting military gains to the enemy, there will still probably be some additional manpower requirements placed on ARVN in GVN MRs 1 and 2. An obvious requirement exists to replace the 44,000 Republic of Korea (ROK) troops now in MR 2. Because these troops are less effective in the pacification role than are Vietnamese territorials – in some respects the ROKs are counterproductive – and because much of their support apparatus would be redundant, significantly fewer Vietnamese troops would be required to replace them.

21. The local security problem in the coastal provinces of MR 1 and MR 2 also may require some additional manpower. The requirement may not be great, since there is considerable room for improvement in the utilization of existing assets by local GVN officials. But to the extent that these officials do not prosecute the pacification effort vigorously, both now and after the current enemy offensive ends, more main force troops will be needed in the area.

22. Our judgment is that the additional troops which may be necessary in MR 1 and MR 2 could be provided fairly easily from the ARVN forces now in the Delta. This assumes, once again, that the present offensive ends without major military defeats or a lasting psychological setback for the ARVN. It may prove difficult to move whole ARVN units from their home areas in the Delta, but a sufficient cadre of officers and men could be moved to form the nucleus of new units in locations where they are more needed. In sum, both in the present period and in early 1973, ARVN should – from a quantitative point of view – be able to handle the internal security demands which will be placed on it as well as the main force threat from the NVA.

### The Air and Naval Wars

23. North Vietnam now has only limited offensive air capability which is deterred mainly by the continuing US air presence in Indochina. If this US air presence remains, Hanoi's offensive air capability is unlikely to grow

in the coming year. Defensively, Hanoi already has a well-integrated air defense system consisting of surface-to-air missiles, antiaircraft artillery, and MIG jet interceptors. Top Soviet air defense officials have recently been in North Vietnam, and by 1973 it is likely that Hanoi's air defense network will be further improved through the receipt of additional Soviet equipment. (For a more detailed discussion of North Vietnamese air capability, see Appendix VIII.)

24. South Vietnam has a fairly large and still growing air force, whose combat capabilities are oriented primarily toward tactical air support. By all yardsticks, this air force – the VNAF – has become steadily more effective as it has grown, although there are still deficiencies. A high level of support is still required from the US Government and US contractors for logistical management, maintenance, and training. Furthermore, neither now nor in 1973 will the VNAF be capable of providing sufficient air support during a period of high enemy activity like the present. Nor will it be capable of carrying out an active air interdiction campaign outside South Vietnam in the enemy's well-defended infiltration corridors of southern Laos. The VNAF has been designed primarily to handle "normal" tactical air support requirements inside South Vietnam at a level of military activity similar to that prevailing in 1971 (see Appendix VII). The above comments relate to fixed-wing capabilities. The helicopter situation is somewhat more complex as reflected in Appendix VII.

25. The navies of both North and South Vietnam are coastal defense forces with little offensive punch. The South Vietnamese navy will eventually assume the entire responsibility for MARKET TIME, the program which has been largely successful in preventing North Vietnamese supply/infiltration trawlers from reaching the South Vietnam coast. Although this turnover will almost certainly impair MARKET TIME's effectiveness, measures currently being taken may offset somewhat declining US participation in the program. (For a discussion of the naval capabilities of both North and South Vietnam, see Appendix IX.)

#### The External Aid Factor

26. Neither North Vietnam nor South Vietnam has an industrial base capable of supporting the kind of war each side is now waging, and both countries are heavily dependent on military aid from abroad. It is a truism to point out that without US aid the South Vietnamese war effort would quickly grind to a halt. But North Vietnam would clearly have similar problems if Soviet and Chinese aid were to cease. For a wide variety of

reasons, in monetary terms US aid to South Vietnam is larger than Soviet and Chinese aid to Hanoi. In terms of real dependence, however, outside aid is probably just as vital to Hanoi as it is to Saigon. The ordnance industries of both countries are small, and each produces only a limited number of light infantry weapons and some ammunition. Lacking resources and a production capability, both countries must also import all the petroleum and vehicles used in prosecuting a modern war.

27. In the case of North Vietnam, military aid deliveries from the USSR and China reached a peak of \$650 million in 1967 but have declined since then to less than \$200 million annually in 1970 and 1971. The decline resulted mainly from a reduced need for sophisticated air defense equipment from the USSR following the bombing halt and not from any limitation imposed by the suppliers (see Appendix XI). The USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC) have always been willing to meet Hanoi's basic military needs. Both reaffirmed their support for North Vietnam several times during 1971 and early 1972, as evidenced by the dispatch of high-ranking delegations to Hanoi last fall to sign the annual military and economic aid agreements for 1972 and subsequent announcements of supplemental military aid agreements for 1972. The March 1972 visit of Soviet Deputy Defense Minister Batitskiy to Hanoi provides further evidence of Moscow's continuing high-level interest in North Vietnam's air defense capability. The monetary value of Soviet aid to North Vietnam will probably rise as a result of this visit, and the Soviet Union may provide some new types of military equipment.

28. Over the years, the military aid provided by the USSR and the PRC has been more than adequate for North Vietnamese war aims as defined by the North Vietnamese themselves. Moreover, there is no evidence that North Vietnamese war strategy has ever been altered because of insufficient military aid. Current levels of military aid fully meet the estimated current requirements of the enemy. It is only prudent to assume that if those requirements change, as may be the case now in the air defense field, the volume of aid will also change.

29. A sharp reduction (e.g. 50%) in military aid to North Vietnam would not affect its logistic capability to support a protracted warfare strategy throughout Indochina for at least 12 to 18 months, although it would affect Hanoi's ability to launch other all-out main force campaigns of the type now beginning. A scarcity of petroleum might be the most difficult problem for Hanoi if outside aid were slashed in this fashion. Military reserves of petroleum would still be adequate, but an immediate 50% cut in oil deliveries by the USSR almost certainly would lead to deterioration in the civilian transport sector of the economy, which currently has only about a 90-day reserve supply of petroleum. For

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exclusively military purposes, however, the Communists maintain generous stocks of ordnance, petroleum, and trucks. There is ample evidence that such stocks are large, dispersed throughout the logistic system, and would be adequate to support a protracted war strategy to January 1973 even if Soviet and Chinese aid were cut 50% today. In the longer run, of course, a sustained aid cutback would force the enemy into an even lower profile of guerrilla war with increasing dependence on indigenous logistic support.

### The Qualitative Balance

#### Morale and National Will

30. The Vietnamese Communist passion for secrecy makes any evaluation of morale and national will – among Communists either North or South – highly speculative. Nevertheless, in the broadest terms there is little doubt about the trends of the last four years. Vietnamese Communist human resources have been stretched in this period, and the military and political apparatus that Hanoi can devote to the struggle is less resilient and responsive, taken as a whole, than it used to be. The decline is best documented among indigenous Communist assets in South Vietnam, who are both less numerous and less well motivated than they were before the 1968 offensives. There has also been a scattering of indications of poor morale among North Vietnamese soldiers, however, and it must be assumed that such difficulties are cropping up with greater frequency. Moreover, there are persistent morale problems among civilians in North Vietnam – problems that have existed in one form or another as long as the war has gone on but may be worsening as the costs of the North's commitment become more apparent.

31. To date the fighters and commanders on the Communist side have consistently seemed to be more thoroughly indoctrinated, more deeply convinced of the righteousness of their cause, better disciplined, less prone to desert, and more determined to fight hard and win than have the officers and men on the South Vietnamese side. They still may be, but the difference is no longer so clear nor so great. The winds of change have shifted; the Communists no longer appear in so many Vietnamese eyes to be the wave of the future. Today, many more Viet Cong cadre and regulars are filled with doubts about their leadership and their destiny, and many more South Vietnamese have gradually concluded that the Communists are indeed the enemy and must be driven off.

32. When all this is said, however, it still appears that at least as far as North Vietnam itself is concerned, the Communist will to prosecute



the war is essentially unimpaired. Hanoi may not be expecting very much for now out of its apparatus in South Vietnam, and it may be having more trouble with the motivation of North Vietnamese troops and civilians alike than it has ever had before. But the regime's own devotion to its cause has not diminished, and it still seems able to get at least an adequate response from the North Vietnamese populace.

### Leadership

33. At the top of the North Vietnamese hierarchy, the fervor and dedication of the men who for decades have set the tone for the Vietnamese Communist movement appear undiminished. Most of these men are now in their sixties and many of them apparently have periodic bouts of ill health; moreover, there almost certainly are disagreements among them on some issues. As a group, however, their quasi-religious commitment to the cause of ridding Vietnam of non-Vietnamese, non-Communist influences -- and extending their hegemony to the rest of Indochina as well -- seems as strong as ever. The depth of this commitment apparently overrides any differences among them. It also makes them unamenable, by and large, to the notion of compromise with their adversaries. Communist leaders apparently still believe that victory will be theirs if they fight long enough, and they regard negotiations as simply one possible route to this goal. True compromise is regarded as a serious possibility only when the movement's very life is at stake, and there is nothing to suggest that the present leadership believes their cause is in such straits today. Thus a significant softening of their revolutionary line, even for tactical reasons, is unlikely.

34. The ruling group is unusually small by Communist standards, and it has been exceptionally stable. As its members age, the problem of succession looms increasingly large. What evidence there is on the subject suggests that at least a limited effort has been made to move new men into positions of authority -- men drawn from the Party, from North Vietnam's nascent managerial bureaucracy, and perhaps also from the army. Practically nothing is known about any of these men, but one or two seem to have a relatively nondoctrinaire attitude and a good many are more closely identified with domestic problems than with the war. It may be that North Vietnam's priorities and strategies would change if such men came to power. This is a risky speculation, however, since for them as for today's ruling group, the Communist struggle has been the biggest single consideration during their entire adult lives. In any case, the regime's devotion to the "revolution" is not likely to diminish so long as the present hierarchy remains intact, and there is nothing to indicate that anyone in the hierarchy is about to leave the scene.

35. Among lower level military leaders, however, doubts about the leadership and the destiny of the Communist cause seem to be cropping

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up with some regularity. We have good evidence of this among Viet Cong cadres and regulars in South Vietnam, and there is little question that the years of war have also taken their toll among experienced North Vietnamese officers and NCOs. The last few years of relative inactivity may also have impaired the combativeness of some Communist main force units. The extent of the decline, which almost certainly is most noticeable in infantry units, is impossible to measure, however, and in some cases it may even have been offset by an increased use of armor and artillery.

36. On the South Vietnamese side, there are leadership problems of a different kind, which at least until recently have been considerably more severe than those of the North. In the top governmental structure there have always been some leaders just as dedicated to the cause of anti-Communism as Hanoi's leaders have been dedicated to their cause. Limitations of social class and educational background, however, have hindered the advancement of many competent people with little formal education, and have too frequently meant that incompetents with "proper" backgrounds have held high positions.

37. These problems have been just as serious in the military services as they have been in the government. (Since many of the leading governmental posts are held by military men, the problems tend to be identical in any case.) Historically, few promotions have been awarded for excellence in the field, and aggressive combat leadership has too often not helped the careers of field grade officers. Furthermore, corruption to one degree or another has been almost routine with many, perhaps most, South Vietnamese officers. This corruption, which also exists on a lesser scale in the North Vietnamese army, makes it difficult for the troops to respect their leaders and dilutes the professional dedication of the officers themselves.

38. None of these deficiencies in the officer corps or among other South Vietnamese leadership groups can be easily eradicated, and one of them - corruption - is probably as rampant today as it ever was. (It is probably no more rampant, be it noted, than in various other Southeast Asian countries.) At the same time, progress has been made in dealing with some of the other deficiencies of South Vietnamese leadership. At the Division and Regional (Corps) levels of ARVN, a number of hard driving and aggressive officers have won recognition and positions which they probably would not have won several years ago. Competence is increasingly regarded as a necessary attribute for high rank or office - though exceptions still abound. In both army and government, most middle- and top-level leaders have become professionally more skillful as managers, planners, and organizers, and the whole apparatus of government and armed forces runs more smoothly. In general, many problems of leadership still exist in South Vietnam, but it is no longer possible to make a clear judgment that they are more severe than the problems which exist in North Vietnam.